GROUP ON EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN THE UNITED NATIONS

WG/Bulletin/47/1
October 1992

CURRENT ISSUES

This is the first of a series of Bulletins to be issued during the 47th session of the General Assembly on various aspects of **discrimination against women** which delegates ought to address.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment of females by their male colleagues, especially by their superiors, has been a festering problem in the UN for a considerable time. However, no remedial action has as yet been taken to deal with it.

In a recent case, the UN Administrative Tribunal referred to "apparently widespread and understandable concerns among female staff members regarding the subject of sexual harassment." The Tribunal went on to recognize that the terms of appointment of every staff member include the right to be free from invidious gender-based discrimination by any official of the Organization. Officials engaging in such serious misconduct have obviously failed to fulfil their moral and contractual obligations to the Organization. **"As a matter of principle," the Tribunal concluded, "it is unacceptable for such reprehensible and disrespectful conduct to be tolerated at any level."**

At long last, the administration has indicated that it is about to issue a policy statement on the subject, together with procedures to be followed in response to complaints of sexual harassment. It remains to be seen how effective these measures will be in reducing the incidence of sexual harassment and in dealing with it when it occurs.

The chances of ridding the UN of sexual harassment - which the Tribunal has categorized as "clearly a form of prohibited gender-based discrimination" - will be greatly enhanced if the General Assembly strongly endorses the stand taken by the Tribunal. The Assembly should call upon the Secretary-General forcefully to impress on his staff - especially those charged with administrative responsibilities - that sexual harassment can not be tolerated and will be dealt with severely, should it occur.

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN A RESTRUCTURED SECRETARIAT OF A REVITALIZED UNITED NATIONS.